

Get Smart About... Rewards and Sanctions

THE FACTS ABOUT CONTINGENCY MANAGEMENT

What is it? A **risk-based Incentives and Sanctions program** is an evidence-based intervention where supervising officers apply sanctions or rewards in response to specific behaviors of the offender. The goal is to increase positive behavior change related to behavior such as reducing drug use or applying for jobs.

How Does It Work?

Incentives, or rewards, are provided to individuals to reinforce specific, target behaviors such as attending substance abuse treatment, remaining abstinent, submitting clean drug tests, and meeting other case plan goals. **Incentives** can include reporting by telephone instead of in person, bus tokens, early termination of probation, movie tickets, or genuine praise from a P.O. Social rewards can be as effective as monetary rewards.

To decrease the frequency of an undesirable target behavior such as missing a supervision meeting or testing positive, officers can apply a punishment from a “creative range of intermediate **sanctions** that can be ratcheted upward or downward in response to client behaviors.” Sanctions can include more frequent drug tests, electronic monitoring, or a short stint in jail (flash incarceration).

Why Does It Work?

Rewards and sanctions, or contingency management programs, are based on the theory of operant learning, which explains that human behavior is learned through the consequences that result from our actions. Behaviors that result in positive consequence will be repeated. Therefore, behaviors that are reinforced or rewarded are more likely to increase, and behaviors that are punished are more likely to decrease over time.

It makes sense to use incentives & sanctions with adults and juveniles who are:

- On Probation or Parole
- In Substance Abuse Treatment Programs
- Appearing in Drug & Specialty Courts



Important Things to Remember

Target Risk Level

Offenders who are identified through the risk assessment process as **medium- & high-risk** are eligible for the incentives and sanctions program.



And the Research Says:



- Positive reinforcement is more effective in long-term behavior change than sanctions. Four positives to each negative is the suggested ratio.
- The results of a study of Intensive Supervision Probation in Wyoming suggest that “offender management strategies that use sanctions for noncompliant behavior and rewards for compliant behavior will be most effective in improving supervision outcomes.”
- Motivational incentive programs are an effective way to help people with substance abuse retain what they learned in treatment and stay clean longer.
- Contingency management approaches, or the use of incentives and sanctions, have been implemented with multiple populations, including both adults and juveniles. Research findings indicate contingency management shows promise for improving outcomes for offenders with substance abuse problems and in specialty court settings.

Sanctions or Rewards Must Be Immediate, Certain, Relevant, and Consistent.

Immediate: Giving a reward or sanction too long after the behavior takes place will not be reinforcing.

Certain: The individual needs to be sure that the sanction or reward *will* be dispensed. The consequences of positive and negative behavior must be written clearly and reviewed before starting the program so that people know which actions will trigger a sanction or earn a reward.

Relevant/Salient: What motivates one person won't necessarily motivate another. Be sure to individualize and apply the responsivity principle.

Consistency: People must be held accountable for their transgressions. Each time the target offense is discovered, a sanction must be applied.

Distal goals may take the offender a longer time to achieve (e.g., abstinence from alcohol and other drugs).

Proximal goals can easily be accomplished by the individual offender (e.g., attend a treatment session today).

Magnitude: The severity of *each* sanction should be *higher* for **proximal** behaviors, and lower for **distal** behaviors. Severe sanctions must not be applied to goals that are difficult (distal).

“Interpersonal rewards and punishments are much more meaningful if the source of these... is valued and respected.” – Bonta & Rugge, 2004

Implementation Ideas

1. Create a collaborative team with representatives from both justice and community partners.
 - a. Write a project plan including goals, outcomes, responsibilities, and timelines.
 - b. Understand the current sanctioning process.
 - c. Create a joint model of what an incentives-and-sanctions model would look like in your jurisdiction.
2. Agree on which behaviors will be targeted (case plan items or conditions of supervision).
 - a. Focus on no more than three target behaviors at a time.
 - b. Focus first on the most important target behaviors (e.g., drug use, employment, housing).
3. Identify feasible and affordable incentives and sanctions.
4. Match behaviors to incentives and sanctions by level; leave room for officer discretion and offender characteristics.
5. Develop policy and procedure, training, and data tracking mechanisms.

To Read More About It...

1. [Bonta, James, and Tanya Rugge. Case Management in Manitoba Probation. Ottawa: Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2004.](#)
2. [Trotman, Adria J. & Faye S. Taxman. “Implementation of Contingency-Management Based Intervention in Community Supervision Setting: Clinical Issues and Recommendations.” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 50, no. 5 \(2011\): 235-251.](#)
3. [Viglion, Jill E. & Lincoln Sloas. “The State of Contingency Management \(CM\) and its Application to Criminal Justice Settings.” *Perspectives* 36, no 4 \(2012\): 32-39.](#)
4. [McCart, Michael R., Scott W. Henggeler, Jason E. Chapman, & Phillippe B. Cunningham. “System-level Effects of Integrating a Promising Treatment into Juvenile Drug Courts.” *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 43, no. 2 \(2012\): 231-243.](#)



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